

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 52 | Number 3 (Summer 1993)

pps. 330-331

Great Lakes Lumber on the Great Plains: the Laird, Norton Lumber Company in South Dakota

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1993 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"Great Lakes Lumber on the Great Plains: the Laird, Norton Lumber Company in South Dakota." *The Annals of Iowa* 52 (1993), 330-331.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9748>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Great Lakes Lumber on the Great Plains: The Laird, Norton Lumber Company in South Dakota, by John N. Vogel. The American Land and Life Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992. xx, 195 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PATRICIA LOMMEL BRUTTOMESSO, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

As European-American settlers moved onto the Great Plains during the 1870s, they encountered a challenge to their traditional wood-based culture: the woodless landscape of the Dakotas. At the same time, the lumbermen of the Chippewa valley had an abundance of timber awaiting a market. The newly expanded rail system connected these two areas that were in economic disequilibrium. The result was the creation of a lumber distribution system that is the subject of John Vogel's narrative in *Great Lakes Lumber on the Great Plains*. His examination of the process and pattern of marketing Great Lakes lumber on the Great Plains during the Great Dakota Boom of 1878 to 1887 offers new insights into cultural adaptation to a new environment, as well as the economic system behind that adaptation.

Vogel carefully chronicles the history of immigration to the Dakotas as well as the marketing strategy of the Laird, Norton Lumber Company of Winona, Minnesota. Four factors contributed to South Dakota's tremendous population increase between 1878 and 1887: land hunger, new crops, abundant moisture for crop growth, and railroad construction. During the same period the Chippewa valley lumber industry matured: united actions by lumber owners, river improvements, and technological advances ensured that the lumber mills were well supplied with lumber. Railroads, the intervening medium, branched out through South Dakota during the 1880s, with the lumber companies following closely in their wake. Vogel painstakingly narrates Laird, Norton's process of evaluating each town platted by the railroad to determine the feasibility of establishing a line yard; they sold through independent yards where future immigrant settlement was uncertain, but established their own yards in areas deemed to be potential boom towns. Laird, Norton maintained a sizable hold on the lumber market through their network of seventeen yards. The key to Laird, Norton's success in the 1880s was their experimentation with vertical integration: the company owned the forests, felled the trees, cut the lumber, shipped it to its own outlets, and sold it at last directly to the customer. The Great Dakota Boom ended in 1887 due to a combination of circumstances: the depression of 1886, the

lack of available land, troubles between the Indians and the white settlers, and the return of the drought.

A topic that merits further exploration is cultural adaptation to the environment. *Great Lakes Lumber* is based on the central difficulty that settlers faced on the Great Plains: adapting to an environment that lacked a specific natural resource upon which their society depended—wood. Throughout the history of the nation, settlers have had to adapt their culture to the environment. By expanding upon how the European-Americans and Sioux adapted to their environment, Vogel could link his study to the broader canon of cultural adaptation.

Great Lakes Lumber on the Great Plains addresses issues of regional and national interest, particularly the rise of vertical integration in business and the process of cultural adaptation to the environment. Vogel studies how an industry and an immigrant culture interacted to satisfy mutual needs. *Great Lakes Lumber* grants the reader fresh insights into how cultural traditions, economic opportunity, and the environment worked together to mutually benefit the entrepreneurs and immigrants on the Great Plains.

A Prairie Populist: The Memoirs of Luna Kellie, edited by Jane Taylor Nelsen. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992. xix, 188 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. \$22.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY LINDA G. FORD, KEENE STATE COLLEGE

A Prairie Populist: The Memoirs of Luna Kellie, edited by Jane Taylor Nelsen, is a publication of great value because accounts of rural women's lives are relatively rare. Luna Kellie's memoirs provide insights into late nineteenth-century life on the midwestern frontier. Her life appears in the book in her own words, undiluted, in diary form. Her story is that of a farm woman, as worker and wife; she also recounts her experiences as a female leader in the Alliance movement.

The details of Kellie's life are fascinating. We read of her circumstances as a young wife in the 1870s and 1880s, of the midwestern farm's incredibly hard work, awful weather, and plagues of grasshoppers. We encounter the deaths of infants, omnipresent disease, and scarcity of food, and the joy Kellie found through family relationships. We are presented with some wonderful details: one day she meets a group of Custer's soldiers; on another, during a blizzard, she and her husband share their sod house with their cattle. Briefly, we are also introduced to Kellie's work with the Alliance

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.